ST. LOUIS METRO NEWS

Nixon Pardons Nine Nonviolent Offenders, Ignores Man Serving Life for Pot

By Danny Wicentowski

Dec 30, 2014 at 10:30 am

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Jeff Mizanskey has languished in prison for more than twenty years -- all on nonviolent pot charges.

As far as late Christmas presents go, Governor Jay Nixon's decision to pardon nine nonviolent offenders is as big and unprecedented as they come.

But for a governor who, before Monday, has pardoned only one person since taking office in 2009, the list of formerly naughty Missourians is arguably more notable for the name it *doesn't* include.

While the eight men and one woman Nixon pardoned yesterday already served their sentences for felony and misdemeanor crimes ranging from minor theft, writing bad checks and marijuana possession, there's no mention of Jeff Mizanskey, the only inmate in the state who's currently serving a life sentence without parole for three nonviolent pot charges.

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An occasional weed dealer and admitted stoner at the time he was arrested during a sting operation in 1993, Mizanskey had the misfortune to get busted in the only state that uses a special felony statute to target three-time drug offenders with increasingly extreme sentences and no parole, regardless if their crimes were violent or not.

Mizanksey had previously racked up two felony pot charges, one in 1984 for possessing a half-pound and then again in 1991 for about two ounces. After the 1993 bust, Mizanskey was considered a "prior and persistent drug offender," and the judge gave him a life sentence.

Mizasnkey's tale was featured in a *Riverfront Times* cover story last year, and since then supporters and advocacy groups have begged Nixon to pardon the now 61-year-old inmate. Mizanskey filed his own clemency petition two years ago.

Daily RFT reached out to Nixon's office for details on Mizanskey's clemency request, but spokesperson Scott Holste declined to comment on Mizanskey's case.

"The specific cases when pardons were granted were ones that were closely reviewed as far as the specific circumstances of those cases," Holste says. "Each of these cases is going to be different."

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Aaron Malin, a researcher for Show-Me Cannabis, says Nixon's decision to pardon marijuana offenders is a good sign, and perhaps it bodes well for the group's ballot initiative that seeks to legalize the sale and use of marijuana for adults over 21 and to allow people like Mizanskey -- with criminal charges stemming from nonviolent marijuana infractions -- to have their records expunged.

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"We are hopeful that the announcement indicates an increased willingness by the governor to use executive clemency to grant non-violent offenders a second chance to be productive citizens," Malin says. "Show-Me Cannabis is hopeful that the governor will continue to use his authority to save Missouri taxpayers money while releasing marijuana offenders whose crimes had no victims."

Among the list of those Nixon pardoned on Monday is Bobby Covey, who in 1988 was placed on five years' probation after being convicted in Ray County of two counts of selling marijuana, according to a release from the governor's office. Two other men with weed possession charges, including a decorated war veteran, were also pardoned.

As it stands, the status of Mizanskey's clemency petition is unclear. Malin tells Daily RFT that there's no process to resubmit a petition after it's already been filed, which leaves Mizanskey and his supporters to try things like a buying billboards or circulating petitions in order to sway Nixon's opinion.

Continue to read the Nixon's full release and details on the nine pardons.

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